

Message Text

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PAGE 01 TEHRAN 02351 131112Z

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DEPARTMENT PLEASE PASS TO SECRETARY

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TAGS: PFOR IR IZ

SUBJ: IRAN/IRAQ RELATIONS

REF: (A) TEHRAN 1968

(B) TEHRAN 2237

1. THE CONTINUING ATTACK OF IRAQI FORCES AGAINST THE KURDS PUTS THE SHAH'S AGREEMENTS REACHED AT ALGIERS IN POSSIBLE JEOPARDY. THE QUESTION OF WHY THE SHAH TOOK THIS GAMBLE AND PUT HIMSELF IN THIS EMBARRASSING POSITION BEARS AN EFFORT AT EXPLANATION.

2. AS WE HAVE POINTED OUT IN EARLIER TELEGRAMS, THE SHAH HAS WANTED FOR YEARS TO GET RID OF THE 1937 TREATY PROVISIONS ON THE SHATT AL-ARAB. THIS ISSUE HAS ASSUMED AN IMPORTANCE IN HIS MIND OUT OF ALL PROPORTION TO HOW OTHERS WOULD SEE IT. SINCE IRAQI VICE PRESIDENT SADDAM HUSSEIN PUBLICLY AGREED IN THE PRESENCE OF SEVERAL ARAB CHIEFS OF STATE THAT THE SHATT AL-ARAB FRONTIER SHOULD BE DEFINED ON THE BASIS OF THE "THALWEG", THIS CONCESSION (WHICH EVEN NURI SAID ALWAYS REJECTED), HAS BECOME A MATTER OF INTERNATIONAL PUBLIC RECORD. IT WILL STRENGTHEN IRAN'S DE JURE POSITION EVEN IF SADDAM HUSSEIN SHOULD RENEGE WHEN IT COMES TO THE ACTUAL NEGOTIATION OF A NEW TREATY. ANY FUTURE REGIME IN IRAQ WOULD ALSO BE IN A BETTER POSITION TO ACCEPT THE THALWEG AS A DE JURE

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SECRET

PAGE 02 TEHRAN 02351 131112Z

FRONTIER BECAUSE OF THE PRECEDENT OF ITS HAVING BEEN PUBLICLY

ACCEPTED BY A GOVERNMENT WITH RADICAL ARAB NATIONALIST CREDENTIALS. TO GET THIS ACCEPTANCE THE SHAH GAVE UP HIS "KURDISH CARD", DOUBTLESS BEYOND POSSIBILITY OF RECOVERY. HE PROBABLY DID NOT ANTICIPATE THAT SADDAM HUSSEIN IMMEDIATELY WOULD VIOLATE THE LETTER AND SPIRIT OF THEIR ALGIERS AGREEMENT BY ORDERING AN ALL-OUT ATTACK ON THE KURDS ON ALL FRONTS. FACED WITH THE FACT, HOWEVER, THE SHAH, WHATEVER HE MAY THINK PRIVATELY, SEEMS DISPOSED TO ACCEPT THE IRAQI CLAIM THAT THEIR FORCES ONLY HAVE BEEN DEFENDING THEMSELVES AGAINST KURDISH ATTACKS. TO DO OTHERWISE WOULD BE TO ACKNOWLEDGE THAT SADDAM HUSSEIN SUCCESSFULLY TRICKED HIM. SINCE THE SHAH DECIDED HE COULD NOT RISK FURTHER DIRECT INVOLVEMENT IN IRAQ, HE MUST PRETEND NOT TO KNOW THE IRAQIS ARE DELIBERATELY VIOLATING THEIR ALGIERS AGREEMENT.

3. NORMALLY THE SHAH IS PRUDENT AND CAREFUL WHEN TAKING ACTIONS. IN THIS CASE HE APPEARS TO HAVE MOVED PRECIPITATELY. ACCORDING TO URI LUBRANI, UNOFFICIAL ISRAELI AMBASSADOR HERE, IRANIAN POLITICAL AND MILITARY OFFICIALS FIRST LEARNED OF THE ACCORDS WITH SADDAM HUSSEIN WHEN THE SHAH STEPPED OFF THE PLANE FROM ALGIERS AND STARTED ISSUING ORDERS. MINISTER OF COURT ALAM, IN A CONVERSATION THURSDAY MORNING, EMPHASIZED AGAIN HOW MUCH THE SHAH WANTED THE ACCORD ON THE SHATT AL-ARAB. CLEARLY THE GOVERNMENT OF IRAN IS NOW CONFRONTED WITH BEHAVIOR ON THE PART OF SADDAM HUSSEIN WHICH, ACCORDING TO THOSE KNOWLEDGEABLE OF BA'ATHIST MENTALITY, IS RUNNING TRUE TO FORM. THESE INDIVIDUALS WONDER WHY THE SHAH, WHO KNOWS ARABS WELL, PERMITTED HIMSELF TO BE BOOBY-TRAPPED. TO THEM THE SHATT AL-ARAB QUESTION WAS NOT THAT IMPORTANT, BUT AS POINTED OUT ABOVE, IT PROBABLY WAS "THAT IMPORTANT" TO THE SHAH.

4. LUBRANI ASKED WEDNESDAY EVENING FOR MY INTERPRETATION OF THE SHAH'S MOVES ON IRAQ. IN ADDITION TO MENTIONING THE FACTORS OUTLINED ABOVE BUT WITHOUT ATTRIBUTION, I POINTED OUT THAT THERE WAS NO INDICATION IRAN WAS MOVING CLOSER TO THE RADICAL ARABS OR TO THE ARAB STATES, FOR THAT MATTER. (THE SHAH TAKES PLEASURE THESE DAYS IN QUOTING A REMARK MADE BY PRESIDENT SADAT'S ADVISOR, ASHRAF MARWAN, ON HIS LAST VISIT TO TEHRAN TO THE EFFECT, "WE EGYPTIANS ARE FED

SECRET

SECRET

PAGE 03 TEHRAN 02351 131112Z

UP WITH THE ARABS."). ALSO, THERE IS NO INDICATION THAT THE SHAH IS MORE TRUSTING OF THE IRAQIS THAN HE WAS BEFORE. HE SIMPLY WANTS TO HOLD ON TO THE SHATT AL-ARAB AGREEMENT. A BY-PRODUCT OF HIS EMBARRASSMENT OVER THE IRAQI ATTACK ON THE KURDS WILL UNDOUBTEDLY BE A SCRUPULOUS ADHERENCE TO ANY KIND OF UNDERTAKINGS HE HAS MADE TO OTHER COUNTRIES. IN OTHER WORDS, HIS SENSE OF PRIDE COULD NOT AFFORD TO HAVE IT SAID THAT AFTER LETTING DOWN THE KURDS (WHICH HE DID

NOT INTEND BUT WHICH HE RISKED), HE HAD NOW ABROGATED SOME
OTHER AGREEMENTS. LUBRANI WAS PENSIVE ABOUT THIS OBSERVATIONS,
THEN AGREED THAT PSYCHOLOGICALLY IT WAS PROBABLY TRUE IN
THE SHAH'S CASE. HE THEN SAID THAT HE COULD NOT ENVISAGE
THE IRAQIS WITHDRAWING MANY TROOPS FROM THE
KURDISH FRONT FOR A LONG TIME TO COME AND THAT THEREFORE
THE MILITARY BALANCE VIS-A-VIS ISRAEL WOULD NOT BE PARTICULARLY
AFFECTED. HE FIGURES THAT THE IRAQIS WILL TRY TO "ARABICIZE"
THE KURDISH AREA AS RAPIDLY AS POSSIBLE, BUT THIS OBVIOUSLY
WILL TAKE TIME. HIS PRIMARY CONCERN APPEARED TO BE
WHETHER IRAN WAS GETTING CLOSER TO RADICAL ARAB NATIONS.
HE SEEMED SOMEWHAT REASSURED BY MY REMARKS.
HELMS

NOTE BY OC/T: NOT PASSED TO SECRETARY.

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